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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SARAJEVO 000226

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR(DICARL), EUR/SCE(HOH/FOOKS); NSC FOR
BRAUN; OSD FOR BEIN

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SUBJECT: BOSNIA - QUINT DISCUSSES SHORT-TERM (TIHIC) AND
LONG-TERM (DODIK) CHALLENGES

REF: A. SARAJEVO 204

[1](#)B. SARAJEVO 149

[1](#)C. SARAJEVO 95

Classified By: Ambassador Charles English. Reason 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: High Representative Lajcak met with Quint
Ambassador on February 5 to discuss two political challenges.

The first was February 2 decision by Sulejman Tihic,
President of the Party for Democratic Action (SDA), to
apparently repudiate the Mostar Agreement on police reform.
Tihic's decision puts Bosnia's near-term prospects for
signing a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with
the EU at risk. The second was the adoption by Milorad
Dodik's Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) of a
party manifesto that, for all intents and purposes, outlines
a plan that would, at best, deeply compromise and could
destroy the Bosnian state. Among its most alarming language
is a claim that the Republika Srpska enjoys the right to
"self-determination." Quint Ambassadors agreed that Dodik
presents the more serious long-term challenge. Nonetheless,
they concluded that OHR had few weapons in its arsenal it
could deploy to challenge him over the SNSD conclusions
without potentially provoking a major political crisis just
as we enter the Kosovo end game. Tihic's about face on
police reform has more immediate consequence for Bosnia and
for the international community's strategy of getting the
country onto a self-sustaining path towards Euro-Atlantic
integration. With this in mind, our view is that the Quint
must focus its energies on Tihic. Nonetheless, we cautioned
against giving Dodik, who understands he enjoys a long
rhetorical leash at the moment, a free hand to translate his
rhetoric into concrete action. If that were to happen, we
would have to be prepared to act. END SUMMARY

Tihic Grabs the Headlines, but Dodik is the Threat

[1](#)2. (C) HighRep Lajcak met with Quint Ambassadors on February
5 to discuss the twin political challenges posed by 1) the
SDA's decision to oppose draft police reform legislation, the
adoption of which would allow Bosnia to sign a Stabilization
and Association Agreement (SAA), and 2) the SNSD Main Board's
decision to adopt a set of conclusions on a range of issues,
which all together presents a manifesto to seek the
dissolution of Bosnia (Ref A). (Note: The SNSD conclusions
were signed by all Main Board members, including RS PM Dodik,
Serb Member of the Tri-Presidency Radmanovic, Chairman of the
Council of Ministers Spiric, Minister for Civil Affairs

Novic, and RS National Assembly Speaker Radojcic. End Note)
Lajcak provided the Quint with an OHR's analysis of the SNSD conclusions (e-mailed to EUR/SCE) and characterized SNSD's action as the more serious of the two challenges.
Ironically, Dodik's provocations were overshadowed by the press attention given to Tihic's public comments after the February 2 Siroki Brijeg meeting, Lajcak said. Tihic continued to publicly attack the police reform process and the HighRep today, ridiculing Lajcak as someone who "only respects rude people" -- a not so thinly veiled reference to perceptions that Lajcak is prone to, as Tihic put it after Siroki Brijeg, "cave in" to Dodik's often obstreperous demands.

Tihic is "Right on Substance," but Wrong on Strategy

13. (C) Lajcak and the European Quint Ambassadors conceded at the beginning of the discussion that Tihic's criticisms of the proposed police reform legislation (i.e., that it is "hollow" and that the EU is "essentially giving in to Dodik") were accurate. Nonetheless, Lajcak argued Tihic had signed up to the Mostar Declaration, Sarajevo Action Plan and Laktasi Agreement, stressing that Tihic knew he was trading "robust police reform" for an "early signing of an SAA." The French and Italian Ambassadors agreed, underscoring that "Tihic had given his word to (EU Enlargement Commissioner) Rehn" to support this approach. The Italian accused Tihic of "playing a cynical game" by risking Bosnia's European future in order to score political points with Bosniak voters at the expense of Haris Silajdzic and his Party for BiH (SBiH). EU Ambassadors also asserted that it was impossible for the EU to lower the police reform bar any further; either Tihic

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reversed course, or the SAA would be delayed indefinitely.

14. (C) There was consensus that the Quint need to reach out to Tihic, explain the stakes (i.e., the SAA), but also concern that Tihic might respond angrily to "pressure," particularly if it appeared that he and the SDA were being singled out as the source of Bosnia's problems. It was also noted that Tihic had secured support from the SDA Main Board for his position before Siroki Brijeg, which meant the Quint would need to speak with other key SDA figures, such as Bakir Izetbegovic, and Tihic confidant, Mirsad Kebo. The UK representative proposed that Rehn and Solana send a letter to all six coalition party leaders encouraging them to finalize all outstanding SAA-related issues, but noting concern about "recent political signals." She argued that this might soften the blow on Tihic. Lajcak agreed to pursue this as well as "a quiet call from Rehn." (Note: The Ambassador spoke with Kebo the evening of February 5 and is seeking a meeting with Tihic, who is currently in Slovenia for his cancer treatment. End Note).

Dodik's Virtual Immunity

15. (C) Turning to Dodik and the SNSD Main Board's January 26 conclusions, Lajcak highlighted several points in OHR's analysis of the document:

- It claims that the Republika Srpska (RS) has the right to self-determination.
- Its constitutional reform proposals were designed to weaken the state and roll back reforms, specifically requiring a return to the entities of competencies previously transferred to the state.
- It represented a direct written challenge to Annex 10 of Dayton by stating flatly that SNSD will refuse to abide by any international community measures interfering with Bosnian legislative and executive bodies (i.e., the Bonn Powers).
- Its proposal for electoral reform would reduce non-Serb representation in the RS.

Quint Ambassador's agreed with Lajcak's that SNSD's conclusions marked a significant new development in Dodik's efforts to undermine Bosnian state-level institutions, noting this was the first time SNSD had put forward its views in a coherent manner and in an official document.

16. (C) After making his presentation, the HighRep argued he could not act against the RS, SNSD or Dodik without full backing from the Quint. In a striking moment of candor, the HighRep observed that OHR was so weak that "I am not a HighRep anymore, just an EUSR." The German Ambassador argued that OHR and the Quint "did not have any real instruments to bring to bear on Dodik." He explained that Dodik "knew we will not remove him" and noted that "capitals remain reluctant to confront Dodik during the Kosovo end game." With this in mind, he and the Italian Ambassador questioned the wisdom of reacting to SNSD's conclusions at all. Public criticism would "only provoke a new debate at the end of which there was nothing the international community could do," the German Ambassador said. Lajcak added that the Russian Ambassador had already told him that his government would oppose any PIC or SBA statement about the SNSD conclusions.

Long-Term Consequences

17. (C) Lajcak agreed that the options for dealing with Dodik, at least in the short-term, were limited, but cautioned that Bosniaks might force the international community's hands by provoking a crisis over Dodik's campaign against the state. Lajcak reported that the Reis had contacted him over the weekend to report that "Bosniaks were increasingly anxious about events in the RS." Bakir Izetbegovic had told OHR on February 4, "If the international community's policy was to let the RS carry on in line with Dodik's approach, it should tell SDA and the Bosniaks. Bosniaks could then draw their own conclusions from this."

18. (C) Lajcak also stressed that left unaddressed Dodik's rhetoric and actions would eventually "dissolve the Bosnian

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state." Dodik's rhetorical campaign dates back to 2006, Lajcak observed, adding, over time comments about the "artificiality of Bosnia" and "the RS's right to secede" will have consequences. (Note: A November 2007 IRI poll found that 69 percent of Bosnian Serbs believe maintaining the sovereignty of the RS is more important than achieving prosperity and stability within Bosnia. Only 26 percent of Bosnian Serbs considered prosperity within Bosnia more important than preserving RS sovereignty. End Note) Lajcak concluded by noting that Dodik and his SNSD allies have been more proactive in the last eight months in undermining the state and preventing it from functioning.

Comment

19. (C) We share Lajcak's assessment that Dodik's rhetoric and actions present an increasingly serious challenge to the Bosnian state, but our Quint colleagues are also right that there is little, at least in the short-term, we can do about it. OHR's credibility is almost non-existent. In addition, as we witnessed in October 2007, Dodik would likely use any international community action against him or the RS to provoke a serious political crisis - something everyone wishes to avoid as we enter the Kosovo end game. Dodik knows this, and we should expect him to exploit it by continuing to test the limits of the international community's patience. An open confrontation right now would also jeopardize our efforts to resolve defense property issues, which could bear fruit in the next couple weeks, and complicate efforts to conclude the SAA quickly. That said, we cannot give Dodik a free hand between now and Kosovo independence. If he and other senior RS officials unilaterally "reclaimed"

competencies, withdrew from all state-level institutions and collapsed the state, or actively encouraged a referendum on RS independence or RS secession, we would have to be prepared to act.

¶10. (C) Tihic's actions have more immediate consequences for Bosnia - they put the SAA at risk. This would be serious setback to our strategy of trying to mute Bosnia's potentially explosive ethnic divisions by submerging them in Euro-Atlantic institutions. Our European colleagues (except the German) sometimes have too much faith that signing an SAA will transform Bosnian politics. It will not. We will confront the same underlying problems the morning after signature, and American engagement will remain critical to moving Bosnia forward. Properly exploited, an SAA could potentially alter the terms of political debate in Bosnia, since, as a formal, contractual relationship with the EU, it would offer the concrete prospect of membership in a club all Bosnians claim they want to join. Politicians would find it difficult to walk away from that. All this should make corralling Tihic our immediate priority.

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